

MEETINGS, MEETINGS AND MORE MEETINGS!

• What constitutes a Board Meeting?

Meetings of the Board are conducted for the purpose of accomplishing district business. A meeting of the Board consists of any gathering of the members of the Board when more than three members of the Board, or a majority of the members, whichever is less, are present and collectively consider a matter upon which the Board is empowered to act.

• What is expected of me at Board Meetings?

You should receive your Board packet with the agenda and any supporting information well before the meeting. Your Board Bylaws will provide the specific dates for preparation of the agenda and presentation of the material to the Board. Be sure you go through the material carefully and take the time to call the superintendent or Board president to ask questions about anything you don't understand. Come prepared to the meeting by having read the packet and reviewing the issues on the agenda. If you have questions, ask them of the appropriate person.

• What are the requirements for public notice?

Reasonable public notice needs to be given for all meetings of the Board in accordance with law and district practice. The notice should be posted at all regular district and school sites before the meeting. The notice should include the date, time and place of the meeting and, if the meeting is by teleconference, the location of any teleconferencing facilities that will be used. Public meetings may not be held in a private home or private business.

• How professionally does a Board meeting need to run?

All Board meetings need to follow some set of "rules of order" for parliamentary procedure, most often Roberts. The method that your Board selects is identified in Board Bylaws. Your School Board meeting will operate more effectively if you follow the agenda, start discussions with a motion and clearly identify what action is expected to be taken following a decision.

• What are the legal requirements for School Board meetings?

School Boards must meet in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. Basically, the Open Meetings Act requires that all School Board meetings, including most committee meetings, be open to the public and proper notice must be given to announce regularly scheduled meetings as well as special meetings. Minutes of the meetings must be taken and include specific information required by the Open Meetings Act.

• What is the Open Meetings Act?

The basic intent of the Open Meetings Act is to strengthen the right of all citizens to know what goes on in government by requiring public bodies to conduct nearly all business at open meetings. This Act governs how you should operate and run your meetings. As a matter of district policy and state law, meetings ordinarily are open to the public. The Board may meet in closed sessions only to discuss certain

matters as permitted or required by Alaska's Open Meetings Act.

• *How should the Board enter into an Executive Session?*

Prior to entering an executive session, the Board should meet in open session. At this open meeting, the Board then enters into an executive session only after a majority of the Board votes to accept a motion to enter the executive session. The motion should clearly describe the subject of the proposed executive session without defeating the purpose of addressing the subject in private. Unless stated in the motion for executive session, or auxiliary to the main question, no other subject may be discussed in that executive session.

• *What can be considered in Executive Session?*

The only subjects that the Board may discuss in an executive session of the Board are:

1. matters, the immediate knowledge of which would clearly have an adverse effect upon the finances of the school district,
2. subjects that tend to prejudice the reputation and character of any person, provided the person may request a public discussion,
3. matters which by law, municipal charter, or ordinance are required to be confidential; or
4. matters involving consideration of government records that by law are not subject to public disclosure.

• *Can the Board make a decision while in Executive Session?*

The Board may not take action in an executive session, except to give direction to an attorney or labor negotiator regarding the handling of a specific legal matter or pending labor negotiations. All other action of the Board must be made in an open meeting.

• *Can Board members meet socially without violating the Open Meetings Act?*

Yes. Social gatherings are not considered School Board meetings, even if a quorum is present, so long as the Board members in attendance do not discuss school business or arrive at decisions about an issue.

• *What role does the superintendent play in meetings?*

The superintendent is a key person at all School Board meetings. The superintendent and president plan the meeting together, but the superintendent makes certain the meeting room is set up as required and all tools that are needed are available, such as a tape recorder, easel, overhead projector, microphone, etc. The president introduces each item on the agenda; however, for discussion or action items, the superintendent is often asked to explain the issue. Most Boards ask that a recommendation be provided by the superintendent and used to make the motion.

• *How do I get involved in committees?*

Not all School Boards utilize a committee structure to accomplish their work. The president is responsible for assigning Board members to committees. If you have an interest in participating on a particular committee, make certain the president is aware of

your interest prior to identifying committee assignments, which is usually done shortly after the organizational meeting.

• ***Who is responsible for setting the agenda?***

The superintendent and Board president are responsible for setting the agenda according to most Boards' policies. Many Boards have time set aside at the end of a meeting to identify items for the next agenda.

• ***How can I get my issues onto the Board agenda?***

Usually, the process for getting an item on the Board meeting agenda is contained within the Board's bylaws. Be careful not to spring any surprises. If this is not an emergency, and a decision is not needed immediately, it is better to have the topic added to the agenda for the next meeting when Board members will have sufficient time to become informed and prepared to discuss the topic.

• ***What is a consent agenda?***

A consent agenda is an item listed on the regular agenda that groups routine items under one agenda heading. Routine items (such as paying bills, approving minutes of the last meeting, approving the agenda, etc.) can thus be approved by a unified motion and vote of the Board. The purpose of the consent agenda is to expedite business and streamline the meeting. There is no discussion of items on a consent agenda. If clarification of an item is necessary, then you should request that the item be removed from the consent agenda and placed on the regular agenda for that meeting.

• ***How should I ask questions at the Board meeting?***

Hopefully, you have taken time to review your materials in your Board packet and have asked for clarification when necessary from the superintendent prior to the meeting. Certainly as the discussion of an item ensues, other questions may occur to you that you have not previously asked. It's important that you get all your questions answered so that you have a knowledgeable and well-thought-out vote.

• ***How is voting done at a Board meeting?***

All votes taken at a School Board meeting are a matter of public record and must be recorded in the minutes. All votes of a School Board must be taken in public, with the exception of the vote to elect the leadership of the Board. Motions or resolutions are recorded as having passed or failed. Individual votes should be recorded unless the action was unanimous. All Board resolutions shall be numbered consecutively from the beginning of each fiscal year.

• ***Do most School Boards vote in a rotating order, consistent order or doesn't it matter?***

The manner in which your meeting is run, is determined by your School Board. It doesn't matter how you vote—in a rotating order or the same order each time. The Open Meetings Act simply requires that the public must be able to determine how each Board member voted.

• ***When does the Board president vote?***

The Board president votes each time a vote is called. Some people think that the Board

president only votes to break a tie. This is not true. The Board president is expected to vote as a member of the Board, in whatever sequence the Board is following. Whether the vote is rotated each time or each member votes in the same sequence, the Board president votes in the same way as the other Board members.

• ***When is a unanimous vote important?***

This may seem like a trick question, but it is not. It is appropriate to vote no when you disagree with a motion. However, once the motion passes, the entire Board should support the final decision of the Board regardless of how each member voted. For a couple of instances, AASB would recommend that the Board vote unanimously: hiring the superintendent and voting on a bond issue. The superintendent is the key person who will run the school district on behalf of the Board. A positive, final vote that is less than unanimous for a new superintendent would be perceived as a lack of trust for this person, and raise questions as to their appropriateness for this job. It is not be a good way to start a relationship based on trust and good communication. If the Board is not together on the bond issue, you can be certain that the negative voters in the community will use dissension on the Board as a reason for voters not to approve the bond issue. There may be other situations that arise where a unanimous vote is very important for public perception and trust. As you serve on the Board, it will become apparent to you when a unanimous vote is in the best interest of the district.

• ***When is it appropriate to abstain or vote no?***

The only time it is appropriate to abstain is when you have a conflict of interest, which should be declared prior to the vote. A “no” vote is appropriate when you disagree with a motion. It is not appropriate to abstain because you have not taken the time to ask questions or because you are uncomfortable with the topic. It is your responsibility to be informed and prepared to vote on a decision.

• ***What questions can or can't be asked?***

You should avoid asking questions at a public Board meeting that would result in addressing any of the topics that permit or require going into closed session. This would include confidential information about students or employees, negotiating strategy, purchase of property, etc.

• ***How can I ask questions at a Board meeting and still adhere to the “no surprises” rule?***

If you want to ask a question that you anticipate being controversial, you should alert the superintendent or president ahead of time. Together, they can help you decide if there is a better way to address the issue or get information. If your question is to clarify an issue, then it is appropriate to ask it at the Board meeting, as long as you don't violate any of the topics noted above.

• ***What is expected of me when I think the Board has made a bad decision?***

If you don't agree with a decision that the Board has made, it is still your responsibility to not work against the final decision of the Board. Your opportunity to show your disagreement was during discussion and through your vote, which is public record. If you are asked about the decision, you should explain why the Board voted the way that it did. It is permissible to say how you voted; however, you should not do it in a way that undermines the Board's majority decision. As long as your comments remain factual and do not evaluate the Board action, you are showing respect for the decision. There will come a time when the majority shares your perspective, and you will appreciate those

that voted against the decision acting in this manner.

• ***Can a Board president offer motions?***

The president is a member of the Board with the same voting responsibilities, no more and no less. Normally the Board president calls for the motions on agenda items.

• ***Is there any requirement as to the length permitted for public comments and must they be permitted throughout the meeting?***

The Board bylaws should establish how public participation would be conducted at a Board meeting. A Board meeting is a business meeting of the district, the rules of which are established by the Board. Normally a time allotment is indicated on the agenda, if there are a lot of people, you may be forced to reduce comments from five minutes per person to three minutes, for example, or extend the time frame for public comments. It is not required to allow public comments throughout the meeting. The timing of public comments is a decision that the Board must make and should be included in your bylaws. You can designate time at the beginning, the end, or the middle of the meeting; some Boards have public comment at both the beginning and the end. Other Boards allow public comment on each agenda item, after the Board has had an opportunity to discuss the item. It's up to your Board to decide.

